

EMPTY TRAIN

The image shows the interior of an empty train carriage. The seats are blue with a white polka-dot pattern. The aisle is carpeted and runs down the center of the carriage. The ceiling has recessed lighting. In the background, a door is visible, and above it, there is a small sign that reads "960 CFF 110". The overall lighting is dim, creating a quiet and empty atmosphere.

**A SHORT STORY FOR ENGLISH
READING AND SPEAKING**

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Introduction

What is a ghost train?

Have you ever been on a completely empty train?

Have you ever had any strange experience on a train?

Is it possible for a large group of people to just disappear?

Empty Train

Lucy got on the train at Ashford.

As the train left the sleepy little town, she gazed out the window and reflected on the weekend she had spent with her parents there.

A comfortable house, home-cooked food. Very different to her life in London.

She lived in a small, cramped room and shared a kitchen with people she barely knew.

Most meals were take-outs.

She stretched her legs out in front of her and watched as the train rolled past the outskirts of the town. Tomorrow morning she would be standing on the Central Line, shoulder to shoulder with people, trying to hold on to the handrail above her head.

Commuting in London was such a drag.

A man came into the carriage and edged past Lucy's large suitcase in the aisle. She got up and looked at it for a moment, then bent and dragged it up onto the luggage rack above her seat with a short burst of effort.

Her mother had packed it full of essentials. Tins of food, sweaters she had bought in the small local department store, and a collection of books.

Home comfort items.

Lucy glanced down the carriage.

No one was on their phone.

No scrolling, no headphones, no tapping at screens. Every person sat quietly, hands in their laps, staring out of the window as the train trundled along the tracks.

Even a young boy, no more than nine or ten, sat perfectly still, his hands resting on his knees, his eyes fixed on the passing fields. Shouldn't he be playing some loud game on a tablet?

Further down, a young couple sat side by side in exactly the same way. Hands in their laps, gazing out of the window, unmoving.

No one spoke. No one shifted in their seat. There was no rustle of bags, no coughs, no movement at all.

It felt... off.

Lucy sat down slowly.

Usually, if she were on the underground on her way to work, her

eyes would be fixed on her phone. But the scenes outside were too beautiful to ignore. A typical English countryside view.

Green fields stretching into the distance, sheep grazing lazily.

She realised she hadn't properly looked at a view like this in months.

It felt better than any screen.

The train suddenly plunged into a tunnel, and the light vanished.

The sound changed at once—louder, closer, filling the carriage.

The steady rhythm of the wheels echoed through the enclosed space.

Lucy sat still, listening.

The darkness went on longer than she expected.

Then, at last, the train burst back out into the sunlight.

The green fields returned.

Lucy blinked, adjusting to the light, and breathed in deeply.

Her eyes drifted to the aisle.

She frowned.

Every seat around her was empty.

Lucy sat up straight.

She looked again.

Not a single person.

The boy was gone. The couple. The man who had passed her earlier. All gone.

Lucy stood, her heart beginning to beat faster, and stepped into the aisle.

There were no bags. No coats. Nothing left behind.

This made no sense.

She moved quickly down the carriage, glancing into each row.

Nothing.

When she reached the door to the next carriage, it slid open automatically.

She stepped through.

Empty.

A flicker of unease ran through her.

She moved faster now, pushing through the next door.

Another carriage.

Also empty.

The low hum of the train seemed louder now. The faint sway of the carriage beneath her feet more noticeable.

Lucy broke into a run.

She hurried through carriage after carriage, her footsteps echoing as she moved, the doors sliding open and shut behind her.

“Hello?” she called out. “Is anyone here?”

Her voice sounded small, swallowed by the length of the train.

No answer.

She kept going, faster now, until she reached the end of the train.

The door ahead of her swung slightly with the motion, opening a fraction, then closing again.

Lucy slowed.

She gripped the headrests on either side of her as she took the final steps forward.

“Is there someone there?” she called.

Nothing.

The door swung open again.

Lucy reached out and pulled it wide.

Inside were two swivel seats and the controls for the train.

Both seats were empty.

Through the wide front window, the tracks stretched ahead, the rhythmic pattern of the sleepers flickering past beneath them.

In the distance, the outline of the next station came into view.

The platform rushed closer.

The driver's seat remained empty.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Where does Lucy get on the train?
2. What does she think about as the train leaves the town?
3. How is her parents' home different from her life in London?
4. What is her living situation in London like?
5. What does she imagine about her commute the next day?
6. How does Lucy feel about commuting in London?
7. What does Lucy do with her suitcase?
8. What kinds of items has her mother packed for her?
9. What does Lucy notice about the other passengers?
10. What is unusual about their behaviour?
11. How are the passengers sitting in the carriage?
12. What does Lucy notice about the young boy?
13. Why does the boy's behaviour seem strange to Lucy?
14. How are the young couple behaving?
15. What makes the situation feel unusual or unsettling?

16. What does Lucy usually do during her commute?
17. Why does she decide to look out of the window instead?
18. How does she feel about the countryside view?
19. What happens when the train enters the tunnel?
20. How does the sound inside the tunnel change?
21. What is unusual about the length of the tunnel?
22. What does Lucy see when the train comes out of the tunnel?
23. What does she notice about the carriage?
24. Which passengers have disappeared?
25. How does Lucy react when she realises they are gone?
26. What is missing from the carriage besides the people?
27. What does Lucy do to check the situation?
28. What does she find in the next carriage?
29. How does her feeling change at this point?
30. What sensory details does she become more aware of?
31. What does Lucy do as she moves through the train?
32. What does she call out, and why?

33. How does her voice sound to her?
34. What does she notice about the door at the end of the train?
35. How does she feel as she approaches it?
36. What does Lucy find inside the front cabin?
37. What is missing from the train controls area?
38. What can she see through the front window?
39. What is happening as the train approaches the station?
40. Why is the situation dangerous?

Empty Train – story and reading comprehension questions

Section 1

Lucy got on the train at Ashford.

As the train left the sleepy little town, she gazed out the window and reflected on the weekend she had spent with her parents there.

A comfortable house, home-cooked food. Very different to her life in London.

She lived in a small, cramped room and shared a kitchen with people she barely knew.

Most meals were take-outs.

She stretched her legs out in front of her and watched as the train rolled past the outskirts of the town. Tomorrow morning she would be standing on the Central Line, shoulder to shoulder with people, trying to hold on to the handrail above her head.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Where does Lucy get on the train?
2. What does she think about as the train leaves the town?
3. How is her parents' home different from her life in London?
4. What is her living situation in London like?

5. What does she imagine about her commute the next day?

Section 2

Commuting in London was such a drag.

A man came into the carriage and edged past Lucy's large suitcase in the aisle. She got up and looked at it for a moment, then bent and dragged it up onto the luggage rack above her seat with a short burst of effort.

Her mother had packed it full of essentials. Tins of food, sweaters she had bought in the small local department store, and a collection of books.

Home comfort items.

Lucy glanced down the carriage.

No one was on their phone.

No scrolling, no headphones, no tapping at screens.

Reading Comprehension Questions

6. How does Lucy feel about commuting in London?

7. What does Lucy do with her suitcase?

8. What kinds of items has her mother packed for her?

9. What does Lucy notice about the other passengers?

10. What is unusual about their behaviour?

Section 3

Every person sat quietly, hands in their laps, staring out of the window as the train trundled along the tracks.

Even a young boy, no more than nine or ten, sat perfectly still, his hands resting on his knees, his eyes fixed on the passing fields. Shouldn't he be playing some loud game on a tablet?

Further down, a young couple sat side by side in exactly the same way. Hands in their laps, gazing out of the window, unmoving.

No one spoke. No one shifted in their seat. There was no rustle of bags, no coughs, no movement at all.

It felt... off.

Lucy sat down slowly.

Reading Comprehension Questions

11. How are the passengers sitting in the carriage?
12. What does Lucy notice about the young boy?
13. Why does the boy's behaviour seem strange to Lucy?
14. How are the young couple behaving?
15. What makes the situation feel unusual or unsettling?

Section 4

Usually, if she were on the underground on her way to work, her

eyes would be fixed on her phone. But the scenes outside were too beautiful to ignore. A typical English countryside view. Green fields stretching into the distance, sheep grazing lazily. She realised she hadn't properly looked at a view like this in months.

It felt better than any screen.

The train suddenly plunged into a tunnel, and the light vanished. The sound changed at once—louder, closer, filling the carriage. The steady rhythm of the wheels echoed through the enclosed space.

Lucy sat still, listening.

Reading Comprehension Questions

16. What does Lucy usually do during her commute?
17. Why does she decide to look out of the window instead?
18. How does she feel about the countryside view?
19. What happens when the train enters the tunnel?
20. How does the sound inside the tunnel change?

Section 5

The darkness went on longer than she expected.

Then, at last, the train burst back out into the sunlight.

The green fields returned.

Lucy blinked, adjusting to the light, and breathed in deeply.

Her eyes drifted to the aisle.

She frowned.

Every seat around her was empty.

Lucy sat up straight.

She looked again.

Not a single person.

The boy was gone. The couple. The man who had passed her earlier. All gone.

Lucy stood, her heart beginning to beat faster, and stepped into the aisle.

Reading Comprehension Questions

21. What is unusual about the length of the tunnel?
22. What does Lucy see when the train comes out of the tunnel?
23. What does she notice about the carriage?
24. Which passengers have disappeared?
25. How does Lucy react when she realises they are gone?

Section 6

There were no bags. No coats. Nothing left behind.

This made no sense.

She moved quickly down the carriage, glancing into each row.
Nothing.

When she reached the door to the next carriage, it slid open automatically.

She stepped through.

Empty.

A flicker of unease ran through her.

She moved faster now, pushing through the next door.

Another carriage.

Also empty.

The low hum of the train seemed louder now. The faint sway of the carriage beneath her feet more noticeable.

Lucy broke into a run.

Reading Comprehension Questions

26. What is missing from the carriage besides the people?
27. What does Lucy do to check the situation?
28. What does she find in the next carriage?
29. How does her feeling change at this point?
30. What sensory details does she become more aware of?

Section 7

She hurried through carriage after carriage, her footsteps echoing as she moved, the doors sliding open and shut behind her.

“Hello?” she called out. “Is anyone here?”

Her voice sounded small, swallowed by the length of the train.

No answer.

She kept going, faster now, until she reached the end of the train.

The door ahead of her swung slightly with the motion, opening a fraction, then closing again.

Lucy slowed.

She gripped the headrests on either side of her as she took the final steps forward.

“Is there someone there?” she called.

Reading Comprehension Questions

31. What does Lucy do as she moves through the train?
32. What does she call out, and why?
33. How does her voice sound to her?
34. What does she notice about the door at the end of the train?
35. How does she feel as she approaches it?

Section 8

Nothing.

The door swung open again.

Lucy reached out and pulled it wide.

Inside were two swivel seats and the controls for the train.

Both seats were empty.

Through the wide front window, the tracks stretched ahead, the rhythmic pattern of the sleepers flickering past beneath them.

In the distance, the outline of the next station came into view.

The platform rushed closer.

The driver's seat remained empty.

Reading Comprehension Questions

36. What does Lucy find inside the front cabin?
37. What is missing from the train controls area?
38. What can she see through the front window?
39. What is happening as the train approaches the station?
40. Why is the situation dangerous?

Essential Vocabulary

Train	Power	Lift
Town	Scenery	Sweaters
Window	Fields	Department store
Weekend	Sheep	Collection
Parents	Tunnel	Struggled
House	Darkness	Spot
Food	Sunshine	Independent
Different	Alarmed	Act
London	Empty	Wrapped up
Room	Panic	Trundled
Kitchen	Brain	Confined
Meals	Motion	Submerged
Take-outs	Engine room	Brilliant

Stretched	Controls	Soaking up
Legs	Drivers	Flickered
Outskirts	Seats	Coursing
Commuting	Hypnotic	Soured
Carriage	Railway sleepers	Barging
Suitcase	Scream	Slamming
Aisle	Gazed	Gripped
Luggage rack	Reflected	Swivel
Essentials	Cramped	Controls
Comfort	Shoulder to shoulder	Hypnotic
Independent	Edged	Hurtles

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary

notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Train – *A series of connected vehicles, typically on tracks, designed for transporting passengers or goods from one place to another, often powered by locomotives or engines.*

Lift – *To raise or move something upwards, often using mechanical assistance; to elevate or hoist.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

The old steam-powered train chugged along the tracks, carrying passengers through picturesque countryside.

The construction workers used a crane to lift heavy steel beams to the top of the building.

Do this with all the vocabulary and, over time, this will help improve all your English skills – reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Discussion Questions

What happens in this story?

Describe what happens in your own words.

What happened to all the people on the train?

Is it possible for an entire train full of people to just disappear?

What logical explanation could there be?

Did Georgina imagine it all? If so, why?

Have you ever had a strange experience on a train?

What happened?

What is a ghost train?

Do trains often feature in ghost stories or horror stories? Why is this so?

Night Train

This is a group story-telling activity.

Get into groups of three or four students.

In your group, you are going to think of a story. The story should have a ghostly or horror element to it.

The name of the story is Night Train.

Your story can take place anywhere, but it must be on a train and it must take place at night.

You can have one character or two or three. But probably not more than three characters.

In your group, come up with a story.

The ending should be quite shocking and unexpected.

You have 15 minutes to think of a story!

When you are ready, choose one person to tell the story to the class.

Ask your classmates and teacher for feedback.

Role Play

This is a role play activity.

There are two people in this role play.

Georgina

A Police Officer

The Situation

In the story above, Georgina is on a train all alone. It goes through a town and she passes out.

Emergency services stop the train, and they take Georgina to a hospital.

Now the police need to talk to her about what happened.

Georgina gives her side of the events. She tells the police what happened.

One minute there were people on the train. The next minute, they all disappeared.

The police find this very hard to believe and continue asking her

questions.

Maybe they think Georgina stole the train...

Maybe they think she did something to the driver and his assistant...

But Georgina is not crazy. She knows what she saw. And she sticks to her story.

Try to find a good ending to the role play.

What can the police officer do?

What can Georgina do?

Get into pairs and prepare your role play.

When you are ready, show the class.

Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

Read the story at the beginning again.

Now try to write the next part. Look at the following questions below.

- *What happens next?*
- *Did Georgina imagine what she saw?*
- *If so, why and how?*
- *But maybe there is a perfectly reasonable explanation for what she saw.*
- *If so, what could it be?*
- *Think of a good reason why she saw what she did.*

Now write the next part of the story.

It is your story, so anything can happen. It is up to you how the story develops.

When you have finished your story, read it out loud in front of the class.

Ask your classmates and teacher for feedback.

Reading Comprehension Questions – Model Answers

1. Lucy gets on the train at Ashford.
2. She thinks about the weekend she spent with her parents.
3. Her parents' home is comfortable with home-cooked food, while her life in London is more cramped and less comfortable.
4. She lives in a small, cramped room and shares a kitchen with people she barely knows.
5. She imagines standing on a crowded train, holding onto a handrail during her commute.
6. Lucy feels that commuting in London is a drag.
7. She lifts her suitcase onto the luggage rack above her seat.
8. Her mother has packed tins of food, sweaters, and a collection of books.
9. Lucy notices that none of the passengers are using their phones.
10. It is unusual because no one is scrolling, listening to music, or using any kind of screen.
11. The passengers are sitting quietly with their hands in their laps, staring out of the window.

12. She notices that the young boy is sitting very still with his hands on his knees.
13. It seems strange because she expects him to be playing a game on a tablet.
14. The young couple are sitting in the same still position, looking out of the window.
15. The situation feels unusual because no one is moving, speaking, or making any noise.
16. She usually looks at her phone during her commute.
17. She looks out of the window because the countryside view is beautiful.
18. She feels that the view is peaceful and better than looking at a screen.
19. The train enters a tunnel and the light disappears.
20. The sound becomes louder and echoes inside the enclosed space.
21. The tunnel seems longer than she expected.
22. She sees the green fields again when the train comes out of the tunnel.
23. She notices that all the seats around her are empty.
24. The boy, the couple, and the man who passed her have all disappeared.
25. She reacts by standing up and becoming alarmed.

26. There are no bags, coats, or any belongings left behind.
27. Lucy walks down the carriage to check if anyone is still there.
28. She finds that the next carriage is also completely empty.
29. She begins to feel uneasy and more anxious.
30. She becomes more aware of the hum of the train and the movement of the carriage.
31. Lucy runs through the carriages, looking for other people.
32. She calls out to see if anyone is there.
33. Her voice sounds small and is swallowed by the empty train.
34. She notices that the door at the end of the train is swinging open and closed slightly.
35. She feels nervous and cautious as she approaches it.
36. Lucy finds two seats and the controls for the train inside the front cabin.
37. The driver is missing from the controls area.
38. She can see the tracks ahead through the front window.
39. The train is moving quickly towards the next station.
40. The situation is dangerous because there is no one driving the train.

Credits

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